



## Spotlight on Treasures

### ***First Chinese-English dictionary***

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*A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, in three parts* / Robert Morrison (1782-1834) Macao: Printed at the Honorable East India Company's Press, by P. P. Thoms, 1815-1822.  
(Call no. U 495.132 M88 d)

This was the first Chinese-English dictionary known to have been published. The author, Rev. Robert Morrison (馬禮遜) (1732-1834), was the first Protestant missionary to China. Since his arrival in Guangzhou in 1807, he had immersed himself in the Chinese language and culture until he died in 1834. He was a prolific writer in both Chinese and English, and his *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, which appeared in three parts, was considered one of his greatest works.



Robert Morrison, inset, and *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*

[Part One (3 v): containing Chinese and English arranged according to the keys; Part Two (2 v): Chinese and English arranged alphabetically; Part Three: English and Chinese]

The introduction in the first part of this Dictionary provides an overview of the origin, nature and history of the Chinese language.

The second part was based on the Chinese work << 五車韻府 >> which contained about 40,000 characters. Rev. Morrison abridged and re-arranged the characters and this Chinese title can be found at the top of the title page of the second part.

Part three of this Dictionary was published in 1822 by Morrison. He spent a total of thirteen years compiling the landmark dictionary.

Missionary and translator of the East India Company aside, Rev. Morrison was also a well-known scholar. His other magnum opus *A grammar of the Chinese language* (Serampore: printed at the Mission Press, 1815), also in Special Collections (Call no. U 495.15 M882 g ), is hailed as the one of the first grammars printed in English.

Morrison noted in the Introduction:

“Letters and the press constitute a mighty engine; in itself innocent, but according to its application, productive of good or evil almost infinite.” 